

we live in cities you'll never see onscreen by **ConvenientAlias**

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: F/F, Getting Together, Homelessness, Implied/Referenced Homophobia, Pre-Canon

Language: English

Characters: Kali Prasad, Mick (Stranger Things)

Relationships: Mick/Kali Prasad

Status: Completed

Published: 2018-07-28

Updated: 2018-07-28

Packaged: 2022-04-22 05:16:32

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 1,321

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Kali finds Mick the month after the Lab drives her helter-skelter into the city, the month she sleeps on park benches trying to get her life together, trying to figure out if she has a life at all. Then Mick becomes that life.

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She finds Mick the month after the Lab drives her helter-skelter into the city, the month she sleeps on park benches trying to get her life together, trying to figure out if she has a life at all. On nights she scavenges the trash for foods sometimes, and it's while she's sizing up a dumpster trying to decide if diving is worth it that she hears a ruckus in a nearby alley. She finds Mick taking on two college boys, shorter than her but violently drunk. In their half-laughing screams she hears the word "dyke" and she forgets all her plans to keep a low profile. She projects the noise of a police siren, and the boys ("shit, man") go running. Mick, bruised and tired, pulls herself upright. Her fists are still up when Kali walks into plain view.

"You're hurt," Kali says.

Mick nods slowly. "Are the police out there?"

"No." Kali pushes the fists down. Mick should be calm. "But if they were, you did nothing wrong that I saw."

Mick snorts. "Doesn't matter. Police don't help people like you and me."

There's bitterness in her voice. Maybe that's what gives Kali pause, makes her think the girl over instead of just going away now that the danger is settled. Or maybe it's that she says "you and me", and Kali is desperate to belong with someone. Either way, the result is that Kali holds out a hand. "Come."

And really Mick must be like her, stranded and alone, because she follows without question, doesn't even ask where they're going. From then on Kali knows Mick has nowhere else to go and no one else to depend on.

She wishes she had a house to bring Mick home to. She doesn't, but she does have a new hidey-hole recently, an empty apartment in a largely abandoned complex. She takes Mick back to it and checks her bruises. Only one is bleeding. They clean it. Kali gives her food.

“You live here?” Mick asks.

“I stay here sometimes. I’m currently... a little nomadic.”

“That’s one way to put it,” Mick says with a snort.

“Then are you nomadic too?”

“I guess I am. Now.” Mick lies back on the floor, knees up. She doesn’t seem to mind that there’s nothing there for her back but cracked tiles and under her head a small, disgusting rug that probably used to be cream. After a moment she adds, “Got kicked out.”

Kali says, “Well, tonight you can stay with me.”

Somehow they spend the next week together. Kali expects Mick to leave at some point—when she spends a night on the other side of town at a busstop because she’s too exhausted to walk back home, or when she picks pizza out of the trash, but Mick continues to tag along. All week long, and into the next. She tells Kali about her past. About her family, now dead to her. About the girl she got caught kissing who couldn’t give her a place to stay. About the week she spent on the streets alone before Kali showed up. She says it like that—“Yeah, I was pretty fucked up until you showed up”, as if Kali showing up made some kind of difference.

Kali isn’t sure how to reciprocate the stories. She gives snippets: the family she tried to seek shelter with in the suburbs, anecdotes of her own hectic city nights, etc. She doesn’t want to tell Mick about her abilities. Mick might tell someone about them—though she’s not sure who, or whether it would really matter—or worse, they might even scare Mick away.

And for some reason she doesn’t want that.

She’s starting to like having Mick around with her. She’d decided not to get attached to anyone again, but this she can’t help. After all, it’s quite obvious that Mick’s attached to her.

Before she tells Mick her secret, she learns one more of Mick’s. It’s a cold night—October is making the “nomadic” lifestyle harder—and

they're huddled for warmth on the abandoned apartment's floor, covered only by a ratty blanket. Mick runs a hand through Kali's long, oily hair and says, "This isn't bad, you know?"

Kali's too tired to argue one way or another. This life doesn't make her happy but she's never had a life that did. At least she's free, in control of her own life. At least she has a strong, good woman on her side.

Mick says, "I'm glad I met you. Even when things suck. I like us."

She kisses Kali's cheek, gentle, almost platonic but not quite. Kali could let it slide, but she understands the secret she's been told. This time, it's easier to reveal some of herself in turn. She cups Mick's cheek and kisses her lips. She's never kissed anyone before, but she's seen people do it—on park benches, behind bars at night, on store television screens. It's not very difficult.

But with one secret gone, she feels the impulse to share another. As she pulls away she conjures a glowing butterfly, blue and purple and delicate. She used to conjure butterflies to cheer herself up on hard days, add beauty to the drabness of the Lab. She used to force them out, force herself to be happy, hopeful. This one blooms forth easily. It is not a hope or a wish. It is how Kali already feels in Mick's arms.

It lands on Mick's nose and Mick goes cross-eyed staring at it. "Kali, what the..."

"It's just an illusion." Kali holds up her hands, and another butterfly floats off her fingers. "Do you like it?"

Mick nods. "But what the..."

"There are things I haven't told you," Kali says. "I am not exactly what I seem."

It all comes out of her in a rush—her abilities, her lost family, the labs, Brenner, all of it. Mick listens. The butterflies quietly flicker away.

When she's done, Mick shakes her head. "I didn't know you had it so hard. Wow."

“We both have our troubles,” Kali says. “In the past month, you have been a balm for mine.”

They kiss again. Mick’s tongue slips between Kali’s lips and Kali learns maybe she didn’t, actually, understand everything about kissing from the couples she’s glanced in public. Not exactly.

For a month they hide out here and there throughout the city. Kali uses her tricks in the bedroom but rarely anywhere else. They scavenge food, clothes, the barest of furnishings for their abandoned apartment. It’s no paradise, but Kali tries to find peace.

Then one day she sees a familiar face in a newspaper. A scientist who’s made a psychiatric breakthrough. She shows it to Mick.

“I know him.”

“Yeah.”

“He was at the Lab. I remember him.”

She can’t sleep that night. Her dreams haunt her. He was no Brenner, but he used to stand back and watch her electrocuted with just a slight furrowing brow. “Fascinating,” she would hear him say. “Fascinating.”

She paces. She doesn’t eat. Mick bugs her and bugs her and she snaps. Conjures fire on Mick’s sleeve. It’s a defensive reflex.

Mick panics and stumbles back. She shrieks, “Kali!” It’s a scream for help, not an accusation.

Kali ends the illusion immediately.

Mick stares at her.

“I’m sorry,” Kali says. “I’m...”

“What is up with you?”

“I knew that man,” Kali says. “The man in the paper.”

“You told me. But he can’t hurt you anymore.”

“But he did hurt me,” Kali says. “And now they’ve given him an award.” Her fist clenches. “I’m living on the streets while he gets everything. It’s not fair!”

“It’s not, but sometimes...”

“No.” Kali shook her head. “I can’t let this go. I’m going to find him. I have to make him pay.”

She expects Mick to try to dissuade her. Instead, Mick nods. “Okay. Fine. But I’m coming with you.”

Author's Note:

I wrote this a month ago in a notebook in a train station, but never typed it up. Here it is now. Kali/Mick is sort of a headcanon ship for me. Does anyone else out there like it?